

**GREASE AND OCHRE:  
The Blending of Two Cultures at the Tasmanian  
Colonial Sea Frontier**

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B.A. (Archaeology and Geography)**

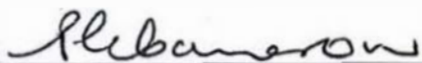
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Master of Arts

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## Declaration

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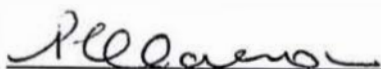
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## **Abstract**

This thesis interrogates the social, cultural and economic dynamics of European and Aboriginal relationships as they unfolded at the colonial sea frontier of Tasmania, spanning a period 1798 to 1830. It argues that the sealers were not a homogenous group of men by character, motivation, or description. Nor were they the primary cause for the demise of the Aboriginal clans along the northeast coast. It also identifies that there was not a homogenous group of clanswomen in role and status, nor were the clanswomen treated as slaves. The thesis finds that the movement of women to the Bass Strait islands was through reciprocal exchange agreements between clansmen and Straitsmen, and both were equally responsible for the repercussions of these decisions. It highlights that the great majority of clanswomen who went to the islands were willing participants in this culturally-based barter system, and they became the resource managers and initiators of the small-island mixed economy.

The thesis rewrites the history of contact relations over the period of three decades and locates the point in time when two cultures collide, fracture, and blend. It remaps northeast territorial placescapes and realigns the connection between the neighbouring lands. It also redefines the timelines from initial social contacts to the fracturing of alliances between the Straitsmen and clanspeople of the northeast lands, thereby redressing former assumptions in the literature.

The research is influenced by the plethora of recycled and sensationalised literary works that to date lack revision and nuance. The orthodox accounts are not fully accurate with a majority remaining silent to the voices of the people whose lives were embedded in this period. This thesis endeavours to fill the gaps

in the literature that have distorted colonial sea frontier history, and endeavours to fill these silences. The thesis has been influenced and shaped by close reading of available sources. It reads between the lines, and in doing so discloses the silences that have persisted over time and across space. It reveals a dynamic, complex and interesting past as it investigates the social, political and economic interconnectedness of human relationships.

Encapsulated within this new account are stories of great hardship, isolation, resilience, toughness, tenderness, brutality and survival. The men and women at the centre of this dissertation are portrayed as two elements: grease and ochre. Together they found a remote and ideal threshold—their liminal space—that enabled the two cultures to blend and form a new, distinct, community that grew and flourished.

## Acknowledgements

On this epic journey, that has taken me back in time to remarkable placescapes and events, I am fortunate to have had the support of my supervisor, readers and so many of my colleagues, friends and family members.

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**I dedicate this thesis to my four children –Melissa, Nicholas, Matthew and Joanne –and nine beautiful grandchildren; Ellyn, Mason, Zachary, Lachlan, Brock, Jake, Kieran, Dylan and Corey.**

**And Ebony (the dog) for just being there.**

**The journey has just begun!**

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